

## **Poster Submission – Ben Addom**

### **“Community Innovativeness”: A New Perspective on Knowledge Creation**

Community Informatics (CI) is an emerging field of study that concerns itself with the design and use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) to enable and empower local communities (Gurstein, 2000). But while the intention of designing appropriate technologies to meet the needs of these communities may sound very ethical, the approach oftentimes lacks rigor. One of the key areas lacking attention is the relationship between community structure and knowledge generation. This lack of adequate work has led to the assumption that communities are social systems that need to adopt outside innovations developed by people in white coats. The problem is exacerbated with the advent of the new ICTs that are seen as panacea to community development issues. This poster presents a research proposal that values a deeper awareness of community structure as key resource for design and use of ICTs for community development. The study is interested in identifying the underlying structural properties and processes that motivate communities to take initiatives in generation new knowledge. The main question, however is, how best can researchers, practitioners and policy makers (interested in the application of ICTs for community development) approach this process?

While the concept of “community” is still a site of contestation in general and specifically in CI, this study takes a geographic or spatial approach to community. The study also approaches innovation from user perspective (von Hippel, 2001) and identifies knowledge generation as key in community innovativeness. In other words, community innovation is a social process that leads to knowledge creation. It is the interplay between tacit and explicit knowledge. The study also recognizes the transformative power of the Internet in disseminating global codified knowledge to the developing and transitional countries (Stiglitz, 1999), but skeptical about its ability to unearth the “tacit” or “sticky” (Szulanski, 2003; Sevigny and Prevost, 2006) component of knowledge in these communities. Consequently, for the transformative power of the Internet to be evidenced in developing economies, there is the need to explore ways by which this sticky knowledge can be tapped and combine with the “transferred” codified knowledge to the benefit of its people.

This study argues that the structure of a given community is a predictor of the innovativeness of that community. Community Innovativeness is the dynamic capability of a relatively stable geographic system consisting of networks of social organization interacting significantly with each other in an institutional setting to acquire, assimilate, transform and exploit knowledge to meet the needs of the system. The model is driven by the theory of absorptive capacity (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Zahra & George, 2000); community development theory (Warren, 1978); community integration (Coleman, 1957; Aiken & Alford, 1970); theories of communication network (Monge & Contractor, 2003); and the dynamic theory of knowledge creation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Szulanski, 2003).

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